

In Conversation: Daniel Ablitt

'Foundations'

5th – 26th May 2018

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SWG: Your work for 'Foundations' has been inspired by themes much more personal to you. Can you explain a little about the new focus of your work; what has brought you to this line of enquiry?

DA: I attended a talk/discussion on the concept of 'home' at the Royal Academy last October. The focus was on the nature of displaced people and how 'home' is often disconnected from the familiar domestic physical structure. Although I'm fortunate to never have been in a situation in which myself or my family have been displaced, it has led me to examine in far greater detail what constitutes a home for myself.

I'm taking as a starting point the four principles of how we define home as described by Helen Taylor (*Refugees and the Meaning of Home: Cypriot Narratives of Loss, Longing and Daily Life in London*).

They are as follows:

1: The spatial home - the physical boundaries of what we define as our home space.

For me I have very strong memories of my father building one of the houses we lived in. Although not the house that I spent most of my childhood, this actual construction of a space is something I have taken wherever I lived as an adult. Importance is placed on changing my environment physically, by hand.

2: The temporal home - found in routines and cyclic events such as gatherings.

3: The relational home - the people with whom we associate that space.

These two for me are intertwined. I think the memories we hold influence and are in turn influenced by memories we are currently making. These are at the fundamental core of 'home'. Without them we are left with just space and objects.

4: The material home – organic, physical elements which are so closely associated with our own understanding what feels like home.

I have a strong association with some objects or plants, such as, Himalayan Balsam. My brothers and I would spend hours throwing the exploding seed pods at each other. Another example would be my mother making bread; the smell and feel of the dough in the mixing bowl.

I intend in this body of work to examine how these memories manifest themselves in my own understanding of home.

SWG: How has this new research impacted on your painting and creative process?

Most importantly, it has added an extra depth to the thought process involved, to fully understand the elements of the subject matter. I feel this is changing my work

from being a narrative based practice (a suggested story or non-specific history within a piece), to a more developed, thoughtful way of working. By this I mean that the pieces are less driven by visual aesthetics and more that through the mark-making and composition they convey both the theme and my emotional involvement with the work.

I think it's fundamentally changed the way I approach the beginning of a painting. I think in the past I've almost started with a finished image in my mind. The research or thought process, having a coherent understanding of what I want to express, before the paint gets anywhere near the surface is almost much more important now.

SWG: Have you explored other media during this process?

The house I grew up in (and where my parents still live) has a large garden on several tiers. The upper tiers are full of box trees under which we spent a lot of time playing, plotting and generally growing up. Recently some of these had to be chopped down to repair a wheel house that was badly damaged in a flood. Box trees grow slowly and some of the trees that had to come down were over 150 years old. I found out recently that they are traditionally used for wood engraving. I've never done it before but it seems to fit perfectly with the theme and direction of the show that I had to give it a go!

SWG: And on a lighter note - Travel is an important element in your work – what has been a more memorable experience or destination?

Recently we went to Vietnam. The highlight for me was going for a 7km trek underground in Paradise Cave, Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park. [It was] only discovered in 2005. Absolutely mind blowing, definitely worth a visit!